

The 2007 Southern Governors' Association's annual meeting will take place at the Beau Rivage Casino Resort in Biloxi, Miss., and will be chaired by Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, who believes this opportunity will allow people from all over the South and the country to see first hand the tremendous progress that's been made on the Coast. "This will let people see the rebuilding and the renewal on the Coast. It will allow people to see how bright our future is by seeing how much progress we will have made in the two years since the storm," Governor Barbour said.

Trying to find a positive after the worst natural disaster in American history is not an easy task. But Governor Barbour feels the increased coverage from worldwide media reintroduced Mississippi in a totally different way, and people liked what they saw, "They saw people who weren't looking for anyone to blame. They weren't into victimhood. Instead, Mississippians who got knocked down got back up, hitched up their britches and got back to work. They went to work helping themselves and helping their neighbors," he added.

In August, governors from fifteen states and two territories will come to the Mississippi Coast to participate in the annual conference and Y'all Magazine will be heavily involved with the activities.

Each year the host governor selects an initiative and theme for the conference. Last year, for example, Governor Sonny Purdue of Georgia choose to create a music and heritage website for the South, www.soulofthesouth.com, which promotes Southern music festivals and venues. This year Governor Barbour has chosen cultural and heritage tourism as the theme of his chairmanship. Y'all Magazine is pleased to begin a multi-piece series that will allow the governor of each Southern state the opportunity to share with Y'all readers the culture and heritage that makes their state unique.

In this issue we are proud to feature the culture and heritage of the State of Mississippi as brought to you by Governor Barbour as well as having Governor Tim Kaine of Virginia share with us the big plans for the 400th anniversary of the founding at Jamestown among other events and attractions from the Commonwealth.

We have a long history of cultural and heritage tourism in Mississippi, civil war tourism in particular. The battlefield at Vicksburg is a great example that draws a large number of tourists. We think of our coast as an entertainment mecca, and it is. But also, it's very historical; Ocean Springs, Miss. is older than New Orleans. The brothers who founded New Orleans came to Fort Maurepas, as they called it, in 1699. They didn't found New Orleans for more than 15 years later.

But, the best example of Mississippi heritage and culture is the Delta Blues. This unique musical genre was created in the Mississippi Delta, there's no question about that. We just don't promote it enough so we've starting doing some things to make it more attractive for people to visit.

Over a period of a couple of years, we will establish 122 Mississippi Blues Trail sites. They are historical markers, each one with a story about a person or a place. The first was dedicated to Charlie Patton, recognized around the world as the father of the blues, where he is buried in Sunflower County. By the end of the development, every one of these blues markers will be equipped so that you can drive up in your car, tune your radio to a certain frequency, and hear the story of that blues marker and music through your car radio system. You can also have the story beamed to your iPod. We think people will thoroughly enjoy this type of experience as they follow the Blues Trail. At the same time, they can enjoy things like the BB King Blues Museum in Indianola, and cities like Greenville, Tunica and Vicksburg, where they can visit entertainment venues, casinos and historical landmarks like the Vicksburg Civil War Battlefield.

We believe the development of the Blues Trail will help bring our attractions together. You think about Morgan Freeman and his nightclub and his restaurant in Clarksdale. Wonderful places, both of them. If they can become places where you can go after you have been around the Blues Trail and maybe seen 10 or 15 of the artists or events, or seen where Highway 49 and Highway 61 cross, where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil to learn how to play the guitar, then we can really create something great for visitors.

Mississippi is the birthplace of America's music. When we talk about the Blues Trail, no one takes exception to the fact that the Delta Blues, the Blues, was created in the Mississippi Delta. When we talk about America's music we also know Jimmie Rodgers, the "Father of Country Music, the Singing Brakeman," was from Meridian; and Elvis Presley, the "King of Rock and Roll," was from Tupelo.

If you look at the American music that is indigenous to the United States, almost all of it has roots in Mississippi.

Hundreds of thousands of people have visited the battlefields of Vicksburg. We also have Brice's Crossroads near Corinth, where Nathan Bedford Forrest defeated an army ten times the size of his. In addition to Corinth, Brice's Crossroads and Vicksburg we have other Civil War sites. I believe in time, and not too long from now, that Civil War tourism will be matched by Civil Rights tourism, and Mississippi is in the process of developing a national civil rights museum to highlight Mississippi's role in that movement. So far we have raised more than \$500,000 in private funds to assist with the initial investment. We hope to have one central location for the museum and use the most modern technology to link the museum with historically significant sites throughout Mississippi. Just as we have strived for nearly 150 years to keep people aware of the history of the American Civil War we also need for young people who wouldn't know about this to learn about the Civil Rights struggle and, specifically, Mississippi's important role in it.

Of course, the coast is the oldest cultural part of the state. It was the first that was populated by Europeans in 1699, and when I was a kid one of the biggest tourist

attractions in the state was Ft. Massachusetts on Ship Island. You took the ferry out from Gulfport and saw the Fort that sat out there. So, the history of the French is still embedded in Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis. There is a huge cultural history in the Mississippi Gulf Coast, but the coast has such strong competing attractions, like year-round golf, the entertainment and restaurant industry, the beaches, the Gulf and now, for the past 15 years, the casino industry.

With all of the entertainment activities it's easy for the rich cultural and heritage of the coast to get overlooked, and part of that story involves incredibly pristine natural resources. For example, the Pascagoula River is one of the longest untouched rivers left in the United States. There's never been any attempt to dam it up or control its flow. You can leave Casino Row in Biloxi and in 30 minutes be on a river that is as it was a thousand years ago. You can be so far removed from civilization that it's hard to describe, and people enjoy that for the peace of mind and change of pace. Not to mention the species they get to see in terms of birds, flowers and animals.

Important to our plans for tourism in Mississippi is to increase the awareness of outdoor recreation. A number of states have done a good job in turning hunting and fishing into tourist attractions. We have a history in Mississippi, like many states that border an ocean, of seeing deep-sea fishing is an economic entity. I always remind people we've got great duck hunting in Mississippi, too, and hunters from all over the world come to enjoy it.

One truly event in Mississippi is the Neshoba County Fair. It's just so different from a traditional county fair. For about 10 days in the summer, hundreds and hundreds of families have their family reunion in the same place and they're nice enough to invite a few thousand other people to come join them. The fairgrounds at Neshoba County have hundreds of cabins - some you would recognize as cabins, and some that have had so much money invested in them that it's pretty high on the hog living. Those families go there every year, sometimes to the same cabin (and some families have more than one cabin). But you'll have family members from California, the Midwest, and Florida along with maybe some that are left in Mississippi. Sometimes there won't be a single member of the family that lives in Mississippi and they still come back for the fair. It has a little carnival for the children, horse racing, and political speaking.

But the biggest thing it's got is the atmosphere of a big houseparty, which is why it has become known as "Mississippi's Giant Houseparty." During the day people spend time together cooking and eating. In the evening, the atmosphere changes - same people, same place, but they have concerts out on the horse track, which also has harness racing. It is a delightful family experience that turns into an extended family of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. My wife Marsha and I have been going to the Neshoba County Fair on and off for 25 years and we always end up seeing a lot of the same people who have become like family to us, and I guess more importantly treat us like family. That's the rule at the Neshoba County Fair; it's just remarkable.

Hurricane Katrina has proved one thing: That we have some of the best people in the world living in Mississippi. After people on the Coast lost everything to Hurricane Katrina they didn't wait around and look for someone to blame. They immediately started working to rebuild their lives, and the world took notice. We want people to come visit us in Mississippi and experience our history, our culture, our entertainment venues and, most of all, our people.